

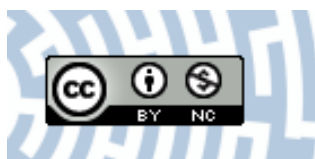


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## **Teachers' Preparation for Work in the Environment of Multiculturalism – a Research Report<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The world is constantly becoming more multicultural in the sense of positive coexistence of dissimilarities. Contemporary teachers live and work in multicultural communities – are they properly prepared for new work conditions?

In this study the examined issues will be limited to those which seem most likely to provide chances for successful preparation of teachers for proper implementation of the assumptions of intercultural education. To a certain extent, they are significant issues and problems in teacher training in general, partially they concern training which enhances intercultural education. What becomes an important issue in this context is the search for a model/models of teacher education as well as indicating the competences the acquisition of which will enable teachers to successfully participate in the life of their own and many other communities.

**Key words:** *teacher, concepts of teacher education, perception of the Other/ different learner in class.*

### **Introduction**

Questions concerning teachers' role and responsibility towards society are raised, among others, by Ch. Day (2004) – with regard to the teacher's professional development and lifelong education, O. Speck (2005) – in the context of moral

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education difficulties, H. Kwiatkowska (2005, 2008) – in the context of the teacher's professional identity, T. Lewowicki (2008) – with regard to positive conditions of the teacher's work in the multicultural community.

What takes place in the global society is the increasing sensitivity to differences, increasing equality of nations and cultures. As a consequence, the world is constantly becoming more multicultural, in the sense of positive coexistence of dissimilarities (Sadowski 1999:33; Nikitorowicz 2001:20; 2009:53-77). A challenge appears in the form of multiculturalism treated as establishing lasting interactions between the carriers of separate cultures (Korporowicz 1997:63-72; Grzybowski 2008; Szczurek-Boruta 2009:16-26).

The number of issues concerning teachers' preparation for life and work in the multicultural environment is so abundant that it seems impossible to undertake all of them in a compact study. A limited range will be explored here: teachers' perception of the Other/different learner in class and the evaluation of teachers' present professional preparation.

### **Perception of the Other/different learner in class**

The studies, of which selected results will be referred to, were conducted by me in 2011. They involved post-graduate students of integrated early- and pre-school education, who within their academic course implemented the subject basics and methodology of intercultural education with civic education, aiming at the development of competences concerning multi- and intercultural education which are useful for work in the multicultural environment.

The research comprised 500 people, students of three editions of post-graduate studies: 2009-2011; 2010-2012; 2011-2013, implemented by the Faculty of Ethnology and Education of the University of Silesia in Katowice. They were women, aged 22-40, possessing a Bachelor degree (35%) and a Master's degree (65%) in pedagogical sciences. In this group, there were professionally active teachers of all levels of education (from kindergarten to upper-secondary school) working in the territory of the Silesian Province, as well as the unemployed or people working in other professions. The basic research tool was a random and correspondence survey, which helped to learn the respondents' opinions on teaching, education and the Other learner's functioning in class.

Like all individuals, the teacher belongs to a particular national, ethnic and religious group. What teachers are equipped with is a more extended or narrow repertoire of statements about reality, beliefs and convictions, which constitute

important elements of culture and which affect their attitudes: the cognitive sphere, the emotional aspect, tendencies towards acting (Kłoskowska 1973: 257-285; Triandis 1991; Matsumoto, Juang 2007: 367-412).

The structure and character of the interpersonal perception of the Other/different learner (a representative of a different culture from the teacher's own, someone who is dissimilar in sex, age, denomination, religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, ability/disability, the way of thinking, the system of values, social status, etc.) by the teacher are affected by knowledge, social role models and the expectations they raise, and some general socio-cultural patterns, i.e. perceptual categories in a particular community, which are fundamental for classifying other people (Kofta, Doliński 2006: 560-600; Rubacha 2000).

In order to ask the question how the teacher perceives the Other learner in class, the following assumptions were made: the teacher views such learners through their achievements, motivations, behaviour patterns, as well as through his/her own stereotypes; teachers treat the presence of the Other learner in class as a chance for acquiring attitudes of tolerance and acceptance; the multicultural environment creates a specific situation for perceiving the Other learner (religious, ethnic, cultural, individual, etc. differences).

The results of author studies indicate that teachers' perception is dominated by learners' intellectual qualities, their level of motivation and their ability to adapt to the demands imposed by the institution. These factors, otherwise called socio-institutional values, do not push the regard for learners' individual traits into the background.

Most of the respondents (97%) positively perceive the Other learner's presence in class. In this group's opinions, the learner's ethnic, cultural, or religious dissimilarity: allows for learning other cultures; enables making new acquaintances and friends; creates opportunities for noticing the needs of other people; teaches respect for dissimilar traditions and denominations; is a great challenge for teachers; is an opportunity to educate towards tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect.

For 3% of the examined teachers the presence of the Other learner in class constitutes an obstacle to the implementation of the educational process. This becomes the background for tensions and conflicts in class; intolerance in families is transferred by children into the classroom; Other learners (e.g. Romany) themselves cause conflicts - it is difficult to integrate them with the class, they do not participate in class and school events (e.g. St. Andrew's Day, carnival balls, state ceremonies), they do not fulfill certain tasks (e.g. the ones required for art or technical education which are associated with Christian holiday traditions).

Teachers notice both positive (tolerance, acceptance, mutual respect) and

negative (exclusion, stigmatization of disabled, shy children, or Romany, etc.) consequences of the Other learner's presence in class.

It is not surprising that the teacher pays attention to the personality values which relate to normative tasks of the institution. At school, where competition is the ruling principle and 'the learner's progress' is valued more than anything, the filter through which the learner is viewed may obscure the qualities and needs of the child. Disregarding them is harmful to fulfilling the aims of interaction.

What seems of crucial significance from the standpoint of the teacher in the complex socio-cultural reality is forming class groups in which all learners are treated equally regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, or learning difficulties. While forming such classes, teachers must apply the ecological perspective and view the class as a system consisting of interrelated elements: learners, the teacher, didactic materials, teaching and aims. This requires from teachers: the modification of didactic activities more towards educating children with special educational needs or culturally different children; creating mutual respect and recognition between cultural groups; taking into account linguistic dissimilarity.

### **Teachers' needs concerning their preparation for work in the multicultural environment**

Teacher education (Lewowicki 1991; Kwiatkowska, Lewowicki 1997; Kwiatkowska, Lewowicki, Dylak 2000; Kupisiewicz 2000; Lewowicki 2007, Szczurek-Boruta 2011:153-203)<sup>2</sup> results in professional preparation, the acquired competences (values, knowledge, specific skills, and relations between these elements) (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1994; Dudzikowa 1994; Sałata 2001; Dylak 2004), which regulate pedagogical activity. The main indications of acquiring competences are attitudes, e.g. the attitude of reflection and self-reflection, the attitude of moral reasoning and of argumentation.

Teachers' professional preparation has been determined so far by many factors, among which there is also the model of teacher education. The current education of the respondents reflects the dominant models (general, personalistic, of specialist education, methodological or pragmatic, problem-based or progressive) (Okoń 1988; Lewowicki 1994; Kwiatkowska 1997), the transitory stage of heterodoxy in the

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<sup>2</sup> Discussions and disputes concerning the model of teacher education have taken place in the area of pedeutology for many years, which has contributed to the critical analysis of the actively functioning concepts of teacher education.

development of social sciences (Paulston, 1993), the doctrines of self-improvement, self-education, and permanent education (Lewowicki 2007:50-56).

According to the respondents, pedagogical education provided them with theoretical knowledge (64.2%), contributed to forming personality traits (63.7%), showed the meaning of work ethos (61.6%), and equipped them with professional skills (61.6%). The respondents' age was not a factor which differentiated their professional preparation. The computed value  $\chi^2=1.684$  turned out to be smaller than the critical value  $\chi^2_{0.05;4}=9.488$ ; for  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.05$ .

In accordance with legal regulations, pedagogical training which this group of teachers received comprised 'the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the area of psychology, pedagogy and detailed didactics – taught in association with the field (specialization) of education in particular subjects and pedagogical practice'<sup>3</sup>.

The variety of functions which the teacher has to fulfill (stimulating-developing, caring-educational, diagnostic-corrective, cognitive ones) necessitates multi-sidedness of the process of educating candidates for this job. Therefore, this process must be: based on general education (knowledge concerning mechanisms of politics, economy, social life in multicultural conditions), personalized (attitudes, appropriate conviction about the offered life and behaviour patterns), pragmatic (skills, competences), as well as specialist and progressive.

The obvious yearning of theorists and practitioners for multi-sided education of teachers has been frequently focused on by W. Okoń (1988) and T. Lewowicki (1994:106-107; 2008:18; Szczurek-Boruta 2010:67-81). Unfortunately, this is a concept of ideal education – the most difficult to implement even today.

Within the framework of the subject basics and methodology of intercultural education with civic education the examined post-graduate students prepare for undertaking educational activities (including therapeutic and intervention ones) supporting the individual in the acquisition of identity. This takes place in compliance with the principle: you learn through what you can see, hear, experience; what you do, what you imagine, what you feel intuitively. The undertaken activities agree with the model of multi-sided training of teachers, which promotes preparing them

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<sup>3</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu z dnia 10 września 2002 r. w sprawie szczegółowych kwalifikacji wymaganych od nauczycieli oraz określenia szkół i wypadków, w których można zatrudnić nauczycieli niemających wyższego wykształcenia lub ukończonego zakładu kształcenia nauczycieli. Dz. U. 2002, nr 155, poz. 1288. (Directive of the Ministry of National Education and Sport of 10th September 2002 concerning the detailed qualifications required from teachers and the specification of schools and cases in which teachers without higher education or without a teacher training diploma can be employed. Journal of Laws 2002, No 155, Position 1288).

not only for regional and multicultural education or functioning in multicultural communities, but also for intercultural education.

## **Conclusions**

Against the background of the research results, it can be noticed that teacher training has so far reflected dominant models of teacher education. The respondents consider them one-sided and insufficient for work in the conditions of multiculturalism. Enriching the post-graduate syllabus with a knowledge of intercultural pedagogy (e.g. broadening the knowledge of oneself, one's own culture and other cultures; sensitizing to the needs of the child – a representative of another culture; practical actions aiming at the acquisition of competences concerning the recognition of the Other's needs, creating the child's identity, counteracting stereotypes and prejudices) provides a basis for rational behaviour and gives rise to an increase in teachers' readiness for professional development and to the reflection upon their own practice.

This study reveals, exposes and draws attention to preparing teachers for work in the multicultural environment. This constitutes its value and originality. The familiarization with the ways in which the teacher perceives the Other learner, with the evaluation of teachers' current professional preparation and with the effects of enriching the contents of future teacher training with the issues of multi- and intercultural education (which means broadening pedagogical competences within post-graduate studies) seems to be particularly interesting and useful for the search of the optimum model(s) of teacher training.

Preparing teachers for life and work in multicultural environment goes far beyond the current teaching practice. It becomes not only educating, training, improving and re-qualifying, but also a real chance to draw new layers of humanity from man.

Current tendencies in changes of the school system (Krajowe Ramy Kwalifikacji dla Szkolnictwa Wyższego [National Qualification Framework for Higher Education]<sup>4</sup>), the expectations from teachers raised by these changes, as well as

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<sup>4</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 2 listopada 2011 roku w sprawie Krajowych Ram Kwalifikacji w Szkolnictwie Wyższym. (Directive of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of 2nd November 2011 concerning the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education) In: <http://prawo.lego.pl/prawo/rozporzadzenie-ministra-nauki-i-szkolnictwa-wyzszego-z-dnia-2-listopada-2011-r-w-sprawie-krajowych-ram-kwalifikacji-dla-szkolnictwa-wyzszego/?on=09.12.2011>



expectations directed to studying teachers, indicate new needs oriented towards broadening pedagogical competences.

What should be kept due to the efficiency of teacher education is the balance between competences in the taught discipline and pedagogical competences. Moreover, teacher education ought to show them a concept of pedagogy which goes beyond utilitarianism and which stimulates to raise questions or analyze different hypotheses.

This task can be fulfilled by intercultural pedagogy, which is a major sub-discipline of modern world pedagogy and which has been developing rapidly in Poland over the last decade. This development seems to be enhanced by the processes of European integration and the activeness of Polish teachers.

Two typical attitudes can be distinguished today in multicultural communities: of conflict, aiming at cooperation, integration, common creation – in the international dimension; of safety, cooperation conditions, and support for the development of the associated states and societies – in the inter-state dimension. To a considerable extent, the future of Europe will depend on which attitude will dominate the life of societies in our continent. What plays a significant role in shaping attitudes is education. This makes teachers play the main role and attributes a lot of significance to the broadly understood intercultural education. Such education facilitates the attitudes of openness to Others and their cultures, mutual enrichment of cultures, and shaping the multi-dimensional identity. In order to shape learners' attitudes, teachers themselves should possess adequate knowledge and the belief in the promoted patterns of life and values.

Societies become more and more differentiated – a part of learners come from ethnic minorities, some are children of foreigners, refugees, or repatriates. This gives a different shape to the teacher's role and brings about the need for developing teachers' competences concerning intercultural communication. Teachers are expected to work in the complex multi-cultural environment, to be able to teach all children effectively, to pay attention to four pillars of education: 'to learn in order to know'; 'to learn in order to act'; 'to learn in order to live together'; 'to learn in order to be' (Delors 1998). The following seems to be also significant: teachers' knowledge of their own culture, its recognition, rank and respect; students' (future teachers') acquisition of competences to create their own existence (shaping personal, social, cultural, etc. identity) and the learner's identity; and shaping the feeling of community (Szczyrek-Boruta 2007). It is equally important to prepare teachers for creative solving of problems at school and in the environment, and for cooperation with learners, parents and pedagogical teams. Even though the teacher's job means acting alone in the sense of facing their own responsibility and professional duties,



team work is indispensable for improving the quality of education and for its better adjustment to specific qualities of particular classes or learner groups.

Contemporary teachers encounter numerous problems triggered by national, cultural or religious differentiation of the community. They take part in many difficult situations, but on the other hand - they seem to have a lot of chance for shaping good intercultural relations. However, they should be supported both in the course of their preparation for work and in their daily practice.

Translated by Agata Cienciála

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